

## FACTORS PROMOTING HEALTH TOURISM WORLDWIDE

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### ABSTRACT

Health care is one of the upcoming sectors both in terms of revenue generation and providing the services. Today, it is being one of the leading sectors in terms of employment generation also. The health industry comprises of hospitals, medical equipments and devices, outsourcing and health insurance. These days India is creating worldwide trademark as **“The Medical Hub of Asia”** by being one of the major destination of medical tourism. Medical tourists go for such destinations that provide them an ultimate end in terms of quality, economy, services and comfort. Today, travelling around the globe is an upcoming trend for the patients for purpose of medical treatments. Medical tourism is a consumer driven industry that signifies the same quality or increased quality of care that may be available in other peer countries with more economy in time and money than in home country. Thus, this paper aims to determine the influential factors that lead international tourists to choose the hospitals for their health related issues as their medical tourist destination.

**KEYWORDS:** Health Care, Medical Tourism, Medical Tourist

### INTRODUCTION

#### Concept of Medical Tourism

The practice of travelling for health and medical reasons has a long history. Even the ancient civilizations recognised the therapeutic effects of mineral thermal springs and sacred temple baths. For example: The Sumerians constructed health complexes around hot springs more than four thousand years ago, which included temples with flowing pools. Ancient Roman built resorts with thermal health spas, and therapeutic temples thrived during the Greek domain. Ancient Greeks were known for their travel to the sanctuary of the healing god, Asklepios, believed to reveal remedies for different ailments in the dreams. This sanctuary was in fact a small territory in the Saronic Gulf named Epidauria- today considered as the birthplace of medical tourism [1].

Medical Tourism (also called medical travel, health tourism or global health care) is a termed used to describe the rapidly growing practice of travelling across international borders to obtain excellent health care and services [2]. Medical Tourism is among the upcoming sectors and various governments are now making a range of legal and financial plans and policies to serve it. According to Ramirez de Arellano (2007), investment in this sector is a means of increasing income, improving services, generating foreign exchange earnings, creating a more favourable balance of trade and boost tourism generally.

**Kusen(2002).** viewed health tourism as the complex economic activity with importance as given to the expert and controlled use of the natural remedies, methods of physical medicine and programmed physical activities, aiming to maintain and improve physical, psychological and spirituality of health tourist and contributing towards their quality and life.

**Van Slipen in Hall (1992).** health tourism comprises three elements as 1.Staying away from home 2.Health as primary motive 3. Occurring in leisure setting. In year 2005, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand attracted more than two and a half million medical tourists (Tata, 2007).

## KEY COMPONENTS OF WELL FUNCTIONING HEALTH TOURISM

A well functioning health system is one which stresses on these factors:

- Improving the health index of individual and society.
- Protecting the population against life threatening diseases.
- Providing easy access to people centred health care.
- Protecting people against financial burden of ill health.

**According to WHO, (May, 2010).** Keeping health system on track requires a strong sense of direction and coherent investment in the various building blocks of health system, so as to provide the kind of services that produce results. These include:

- **Leadership and Governance-** Insuring that health authorities take responsibility for steering the entire health sector and for dealing with future challenges as well as with current problems, formulation of country's commitment to high level policy goals. A strategy for translating these policy goals into its implication for financing, human resources, technology, infrastructure and service delivery.
- **Health Information Systems-** These includes timely intelligence on health financing and barriers to health services, progress in meeting health challenges and social objectives, access to care and on quality of services provided.
- **Health Financing-** It includes a system to raise sufficient funds for health fairly, system to pool financial resources across population groups to share financial risks and financial audit, public expenditure reviews and clear operational rules to insure efficient use of funds.
- **Human Resources for Health-** This requires arrangements for achieving sufficient numbers of right mix (numbers, diversity and competencies), payment systems that produce right kind of incentives, establishment of job related norms, deployment of support systems and enabling work environment, mechanisms to insure cooperation of all stake holders as health worker, advisory groups, donor coordination groups, private sector, professional associations and communities.
- **Essential Medical Products and Technologies-** Key components of this system are a national medical products availability and price monitoring system, a national programme to promote rational prescribing, national list of essential medical products, national diagnostic and treatment protocols, to guide procurement, reimbursement and training.
- **Service Delivery-** This critically depends on networks of close to client primary care, organised as health district or local area network with backup of specialised services, mechanism to hold providers accountable for access and quality and to insure consumer voice.

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS IN DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTH TOURISM

Contributing factors can be classified into two forces to describe how individuals are pushed by motivation variables into making travel decisions and how they are pulled or attracted by destination attributes (Dann, 1977; Uysal and Hagan, 1993) [3].

Thus, contributing factors are those which because of their excellencies and quality push the people to travel from their home countries to other offshore countries for medical treatments and health and welfare related issues. New developments in information and technologies have enabled the easy access to the global information about the health services. Significant contributing factors are:

### Push and Pull Factors

- **Affluent Patients-** They typically explore options beyond borders due to dissatisfaction with their domestic health system such as unavailability of appropriate treatments, relatively low quality of care, absence of modern technology and shortage of health-care providers. For instance, India is becoming an attractive medical travel destination for patients from Bangladesh, 50,000 Bangladeshis every year [4].
- **Affordable Care-** Many countries of first world are confronted with problems such as rapid increase in health cost and shortage of health staff. These patients often choose to travel to third world countries where high quality services are offered at comparatively lower cost with simplify visa requirements for medical tourists. For example- Thailand and India [5].
- **Communication and Languages-** Basala and Kleonsky (2001) found people were more likely to visit a novel destination if their home languages were spoken in that destination. Language barriers less likely happen among health tourist visiting South –East Asia countries [6].
- **Hospitality, Culture and Social Environment-** Hospitality and social environment are playing an effective role in attracting tourist .The Pacific Asia Travel Association(1995) suggested China was the most popular destination for Hong Kong nationals because of its similar culture backgrounds.
- **No Wait –lists-** Another reason to go to offshore is to avoid the delays associated with long waiting lists. In state run health programs like those in Canada or U.K waiting list can extend to more than a year for essential surgery and past three for non –essential surgery(Runckel,2007)[7].
- **Climate-** Pleasant and favourable climate is the main attraction for foreign tourists. Very warm and humid climates situated near equator are preferred by the travellers from cold climatic origins and vice-versa.
- **Tourist Attractions-** Various tourists attractions as historical, cultural, religious, natural and environment can also be one of the significant motivator for offshore medical tourists.
- **Travel Distance-** The medical tourists destinations if too far can lead to various inconveniences in form of health, finance and discomfort for the medical tourists. So, they do not prefer such long root destinations. They demand varies inversely with distance travelled (Bull, 1991).
- **Tourism Transportation Infrastructure-** Easy access to tourism destinations in terms of international transport and facilities for easy movement within the destinations are generally considered to be prerequisites for

development of tourism (UN, 2001). Choice of airline can be affected by operating factors like immigration, customs, quarantine (UN, 2001)[8]

- **Cost Variation**-The cost of medical treatments of third world countries as Thailand, India is comparatively lower than first world countries .For example Heart valve replacement cost \$200,000in US goes for \$10,000 in India inclusive of airfare and short vacation.
- **Specialized Medical Services** - Specialized medical services are one of the significant reasons for growth of health sector. For example Thailand has established a niche for itself for cosmetic surgery, dental operation as well as sex change operations (UNESCAP, 2007).In same way countries of Singapore specialize in heart surgery and eye treatment among Asian countries [9].
- **Health Workforce** - An efficient and emphatatic workforce act as a magnet for attracting more of foreign tourists. Trained and empowered nurses due to their excellent services and care towards the patients can be a significant reason for bloom in this industry.

### Wellness Tourism

It is also a part of medical tourism industry. It involves travelling by the people offshore to proactively undertake activities to enhance personal health and wellbeing and to enjoy the rejuvenations and relaxing therapies not available at their home country. These include spas, mud massages, and ayurveda and unani therapies. For example: Thailand is known as spa capital of Asia with the registered 1200 spas of which 400 are high end luxury facilities. Malaysia also offers alternative medicine including ayurveda, siddha, unani and traditional Chinese medicine [10]. In same way India also offers both conventional and alternative medicine. If big hospitals in India target specialized surgery or specific procedures, there is an equal opportunity to attract people for lifestyle, distressing or other diseases requiring alternative medicine(Medical Tourism is a\$2.2 billion opportunity for India by 2012,accelerating at the growth of 30%p.a(Mc Kinsey,C11).Yoga, Meditation and Ayurveda,India extends its benefits with deeper subject knowledge from ancient and holistic practices of ayurveda.Kerala is one such state which has really put itself big on the map of ayurveda,holistic wellness and healing[11].

### 4 P's of Health Marketing

Today, healthcare market has been globalized with increased competition, advance technology and innovative services. So, patients have more options than ever before Therefore, there is an intense need to develop a proper market strategy that do the magic .Thus, the four P,s of the health care market are:

- **Price**

With high cost of healthcare in first world countries as U.S. Price is among the most crucial concern for prospective patients, especially those not covered under health insurance. For example, cosmetic surgery can cost high in US than India. Thus, many service providers in order to promote their business provide more discounted services as B.P check, Cholestrol test or H.I.V test.

- **Placement**

Vital services should be made available to the patients at no cost and ease to be effective. If the services are time

bound and in limited access then the patients does not feel relaxed and comfortable and health providers to lose the patients because of lack of services. Thus, providers should expand their service area with more increased working hours and supporting staff by hiring new recruits to excel in their services and top the competitive environment.

- **Product**

Service providers must also deliver products to the patients that can improve their quality of life. It includes medication, testing kits and orthopaedic supplies according to the suitability of the needs of the patients. For instance the provider must not only determine if the patient need medication for depression but other products that reduce depression should also be offered [12].

- **Promotion**

To expand the business various techniques of promotion should be adhered to. Many large service providers such as major hospitals chains or pharmaceutical manufactures use mass media and online media to promote their services. Small providers can use colourful brochures, tele-calling and pamphlets distribution etc. For example Creston Children's Dental Clinic in Portland, Oregon created colourful and educational brochures to promote their efforts to provide dental care to the areas low income children's [13].

### **Patient-Related Factors**

- **Age**-older patients tend to be more satisfied with their health care than the younger patients who are hardly satisfied fully.
- **Ethnicity**-Indian, Alaskan natives are less satisfied than Non-Hispanics White had the highest satisfaction followed by the African/Americans [14].
- **Gender**-In some studies women are shown to be more satisfied, while in other its vice-versa. Thus, it is still vague.
- **Socioeconomic Status**-People of low socioeconomic status and poor educational background tend to be less satisfied. One study has shown that poorer satisfaction with the care is associated with experiencing worry, depression, fear and hopelessness [15].

### **Physician-Related Factors**

- **Communication**-When patients come with some health related issues and they are attended with sincerity, seriously and empathy and are given proper advice, those patients feel more satisfied.
- **Free Expression of Feelings and Problems**- When physicians express less control over the feelings and expression of the problems and encouraging patients to express their ideas freely, those patients tend to be more satisfied.
- **Time Spent**-The quantity and quality of time spent by the doctors in their visits to patients also affect the level of patient satisfaction. Both the time spent and the satisfaction levels are directly related.
- **Technical Skills**-The findings are contradictory. In a survey of 236 vulnerable older patients, better communication skills were linked to higher patient satisfaction but technical expertise was not [16]. However,

another study reveals that technical expertise dominate more in patient satisfaction than bed side manners[17].

- **Appearance**-In one study from New Zealand, patients indicated that they preferred “semiformal” attire and a smile. Next, in order of preference, were “semi-formal” dress without a smile, a white coat, a formal suit, jeans and casual dress [18].

### System-Related Factors

#### The Nursing Role: The Most Important Source of Satisfaction

Although patients prime focus in choosing the medical treatment is doctors but the next person is nurse who is more close to the patients; always on his bedside. One study found that while physician care was most influential to patients, satisfaction, the compassion, willingness to help and promptness of the physicians staff were next in importance[19]. Patients who had remained in a practice for more than 15 years attributed their loyalty to their physician first and to the “team concept” second[20]. In another large database of surveys, nurses were the most important source of satisfaction, ahead of access to care issues[21]. Nurses have dual role to play in medical tourism as to be warm and compassionate towards the patients from offshore and to help counsel the clients where to target their medical destination.

### SOME FAMOUS DESTINATIONS WORLDWIDE FOR MEDICAL TOURISM

It includes Argentina, Brunei, Cuba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Hongkong, Hungary, India, Jordan, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore, South America, Thailand, UAE, South Korea, Ukraine and New Zealand (Gahlinger, P M, 2008). A recent article in International Medical Travel Journal (2011), mentioned that every year, there are 5000 medical tourists from Oman who travels mostly to India and the United Kingdom for medical treatments. The reason is exceptional medical treatments that cost only a fraction of total health care expenditure in many advanced first world countries like USA and UK in comparison to the third world countries like India, Thailand etc. For instance, according to an article in Times Magazine, (2010), a liver transplant procedure that cost \$ 300,000 USD in United States only cost about \$ 91,000 USD in Taiwan. Another article from Bloomberg Business week (2008), says that heart bypass operation which cost \$ 100,000 USD in United States only cost \$ 18,500 USD in Singapore, \$ 11,000 USD in Thailand and \$ 10,000 USD in India. Medical care in countries such as India, Thailand and Singapore can cost as little as 10% of cost of comparable care in United States (Deloitte Development LLC, 2008) [22].

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